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THE MORAL INFLUENCE OF SUPERINTENDENTS AND HEAD NURSES

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SOME years ago, during one of the conversations which it was my great privilege to have with Florence Nightingale, we were discussing the influence of a superintendent upon her nurses. She spoke of one who had recently died and said with much emotion, "She was a mother to her nurses, all her sympathies were with them." Referring to her successor she said, with a whimsical smile, "She is just a book with a skeleton in front." Miss Nightingale, with her deep insight into human nature, touched the very core of the secret of a superintendent's influence over those under her charge.

She must have the power of sympathy, if she is to win the hearts of her nurses and bring out all that is best and noblest in them. She must be able to see things through her nurses' eyes and realize how they appear from their point of view, if she is to win their hearty acquiescence and cordial co-operation in the measures she devises for their good. Before she can create an *esprit de corps* in the school she must be able to inspire a personal loyalty to herself, and when this is once accomplished the tone of the school will rise imperceptibly to any height she wishes it to attain, or any standard she can set for it.

Women will do much for love and from a desire to please that cannot be extorted from them by any outside pressure, and nurses are no exception to the rules that govern their sex.

Perfect justice and fairness should mark all the dealings of a superintendent with her pupils. If they have confidence in her and know that she sincerely intends to judge justly, they will not resent it if her fallible human nature sometimes betrays her into judgments that seem to them unduly harsh, or lenient, to the offenders. She must try to hold the scales of justice evenly and to strike the balance fairly between the sometimes conflicting claims of the hospital authorities, the patients, and her nurses. If the latter are imbued with a deep conviction that their interests are safe in her hands, they will not resent the concessions that it is sometimes her duty to make to the other members of the triad.

When a superintendent is known to be careful of the comfort and

welfare of her nurses, using her influence to procure for them proper hours of service, with time for study and recreation, comfortable and well-served meals, and in every way in her power helping to better the conditions under which their work must be done, she is in a position to ask for extra service when it is needed without the fear of its being rendered unwillingly.

The moral influence of a superintendent cannot be great unless she can inspire respect in her nurses. If they feel that she sincerely wishes to do what is right and is herself honest and upright, she will have less difficulty in exacting the same standard of conduct in them. Fear of offending or grieving her by acts of doubtful import should be strong enough to make them wish to avoid them.

There are, of course, cases in which no motive seems to be powerful enough to prevent those who wish to do so from breaking the clearly-defined bounds that must hedge in a training school. When the offence is flagrant and wilful the superintendent loses her moral influence unless she is strong enough to punish it, not vindictively, but justly, quite undeterred by any possible loss of popularity. The appeal is to the moral sense of the school and it is seldom made in vain if the facts are clearly understood.

If the superintendent can make friends of her head nurses and executive officers and make the undergraduate nurses feel that everything she does is intended to conduce to their ultimate good, the question of discipline becomes a less difficult one. The day may come when the self-government that is the rule in some schools and colleges will be introduced into training schools and the nurses will make their own laws of conduct and punish by public consent any deviation from them. When this is the case the problem of discipline will be happily solved.

One of the most potent means that a superintendent can use to enhance her influence is judicious praise. It must be employed sparingly and not given without due cause. When a nurse knows that kindly appreciation will follow her efforts to do her work especially well, or warm acknowledgment will reward any special triumph of care and watchfulness in a difficult case, she will be stimulated to do her very best and even to try to achieve the impossible. The disheartening feeling that what one does matters little to those in power, so long as one gets through certain prescribed duties fairly well, should never be allowed to creep into a training school. There should be quick recognition of unusual ability or faithfulness, and trustworthiness should be rewarded with appreciation, not only felt, but expressed.

Head nurses come so much nearer to the pupils in daily contact

than it is possible for the superintendent to do that their opportunities for exercising moral influence over them is perhaps even greater than hers.

It has often amazed me to see how completely some head nurses seem to have forgotten that they were once probationers and assistant nurses themselves. Not a memory, apparently, remains of the trials and difficulties that they themselves underwent in their previous undeveloped existence, before they attained to their present dignity.

The Golden Rule is as important a part of a head nurse's equipment as a knowledge of the latest procedure in asepsis, or the best way to move a helpless patient. She cannot do unto her nurses as she would wish them to do unto her, should the situation be reversed, if she has forgotten how it feels to be an anxious probationer, or an ambitious assistant nurse.

The head nurse has absolute control of her ward in many ways and it rests with her whether it shall be a place to which the pupils long to be transferred, or one to which they dread and dislike to come. She regulates the atmosphere of the ward in far more than the physical sense, and is responsible for the spirit that animates it. We can all look back and remember head nurses whom we loved in spite of their strictness and insistence on the exact fulfilment of every duty, and others whom we neither liked nor respected, though they did not hold us so strictly to account in minor matters. The daily example of the head nurse cannot but have the most powerful influence over those who are so closely associated with her in the routine work of the ward.

Her standard of honor must affect them, whether they are fully aware of it or not. If a mistake is made in carrying out orders and she endeavors to conceal it, or to shift the blame on some one else, who perhaps was less responsible than herself, instead of bravely acknowledging the facts and doing her best to repair the mischief, her nurses' respect for her and confidence in her must be diminished. If their own moral sense is weak they are confirmed in the belief that it is clever to escape unpleasant consequences by any means in one's power. If they are of stronger moral fibre they must despise her for the subterfuge, yet there is a lowering of the standard that may make it easier for them to fail in some moment of trial, remembering that she successfully evaded the penalties of detection. It is almost impossible to do wrong without harming others, nor right without helping them.

The head nurse's attitude towards the rules of the hospital has an immense influence on the nurses. Obedience to authority is very difficult for some natures. Rules present themselves to such persons as something to be evaded if possible, a challenge to disobedience. Laws are made

for the benefit of the governed, theoretically at least, and if those who are bound by them cannot see the wisdom of any particular one they are not therefore free to disobey it. Having voluntarily placed themselves in an institution, it is their duty to submit to any restrictions that may prevail there without rebelling against them. If the head nurses are honestly desirous to assist the authorities in maintaining the order that comes from obedience to regulations they are a tremendous power for good.

Things that are perfectly harmless in the outside world are an infringement of the decorum that should prevail in a hospital, where sickness and suffering are the staple of life, and every energy during working hours should be concentrated on their alleviation. If a head nurse permits herself to indulge in trifling conversation or the mildest flirtation with the medical students whose duties bring them to the wards, she must not be surprised if her nurses follow her example, should they be inclined to such frivolities. She cannot expect them to be reserved and dignified if she lowers her own dignity in this way. When she herself is blameless it is more easy for her to impress upon a young nurse that these things, which are absolutely harmless in other surroundings, are out of place in a hospital ward and will not conduce to her good standing in the school.

In no other way can a head nurse exert more influence over her nurses than in the model she sets before them in her treatment of the patients. Kindness, gentleness, patience, we all know the good qualities that belong to the ideal nurse, but oh! how hard to possess them when one is tired and worried and the impatient word comes so easily, or the trivial neglect seems to matter so little. It is then that the steadying influence of the head nurse makes itself felt. If the spirit of kindness and consideration pervades the ward, the nurses fall in with it and are kind and considerate too, they are ashamed to be otherwise, even if no nobler motive inspires them.

The hospital exists for the patients and for no other reason. The nurses are there to be trained for the care of other sick persons. No one quality will so further their success in private nursing as a kind and sympathetic manner. Is it not then a nurse's duty to acquire one? She can only do it by constant practice. It is the head nurse's duty to teach her by example and precept that no trouble is too great to take if it adds to the comfort of a patient or helps to relieve pain, and that no annoyance is too small to be removed if its absence will assist in bringing ease to a sufferer.

Many times in their future career they will thank her for the lesson and remember, tenderly and gratefully, her influence over them for good.